

Future Land Use Plan 2005 Progress Report

Director **Wayne Clark**

Planning Manager Kaye Graybeal

Traffic Engineering Manager Jim Flechtner

City Engineer **Bill Penny**

Graphic Designer Debi Haynes

March 2006 City of Wilmington **Development Services Department** Wilmington, NC

Choices

The City is off to a good start.

ilmington's first Future Land Use Plan is not sitting on a shelf gathering dust. Although successfully implementing the 20-year plan requires long-term commitment, the City is off to a good start. In the year since the Plan was adopted, the City has initiated or partnered in a number of efforts that will create a better future for our community. We made the choices called for in the Plan — the choices of a great city.



Mayfaire

Introduction

The choices we make today will determine our future.





The choices we make today will determine our future. Every city makes choices that affect its neighborhoods, commercial areas and landscapes. Each choice can add to or detract from the character of a city. Great cities do not happen by accident. Special places do not retain the qualities that made them special without a good deal of conscious effort. What choices did we make in 2005?

Purpose

In the fall of 2004, the City adopted a series of long-range plans to guide development of the community. The centerpiece of these plans is the Future Land Use Plan (FLUP) which outlines how the city should develop and redevelop from 2005-2025. The Plan contains a vision for the future of Wilmington and a series of guiding principles, objectives and strategies to achieve that vision. This report describes the progress the community has made towards achieving the vision described in the FLUP.

Vision

The FLUP envisions Wilmington in 2025 as an attractive and safe community known for its historic character, vibrant waterfront downtown, numerous parks and public spaces, excellent neighborhoods and strong economy.

Wilmington's location nestled between the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean is one of its greatest resources.

Plan

The Future Land Use Plan was developed in 2003-2004 with a strong emphasis on community input. By the time the Plan was adopted, staff had held almost 100 meetings with various groups in the community and utilized a series of creative input methods to enhance the process.

The Plan anticipates three primary development trends over the next twenty years: (1) Infill of vacant land; (2) Redevelopment of aging commercial areas and; (3) Transition of some residential areas to higher densities or commercial uses.

In addition to development trends, the Plan provides policy direction for change related to the environment, historic resources, neighborhoods, public spaces, recreation and transportation.

Progress

In order to achieve the Plan's vision, some things must change and some things must be preserved. In both cases, the City and its stakeholders must take conscious action to see the desired future become reality. We will not be able to sustain the current assets of the community and ensure the quality of future development without actively influencing change. The Plan will not make Wilmington perfect and it is not reasonable to expect that everything must happen according to the Plan for it to be successful. The Plan is intended to ensure the choices we make now and in the future will methodically progress Wilmington toward the ideals that define our collective vision for the future.

The FLUP is a long range plan with a 20-year horizon. Progress may not always be obvious on an annual basis. The vision is expected to be achieved through the incremental and cumulative impacts of a series of changes. There will probably be some major activities that have a more immediate effect such as the North Downtown redevelopment. There are likely to be some setbacks and the Plan will probably need a few amendments during the 20-year cycle. However, we must not lose sight of the vision nor allow short-term issues to negatively impact the future. In order to maintain focus on the long-range goals, this report is organized around the major components of the community's vision. Actions taken to implement the Plan are included in this report under the following categories:

Categories

- Improving Community Appearance
- Reducing Traffic Congestion
- Strengthening the Economy
- Parks and Public Spaces
- Protecting Our Assets
- Planned Growth
- Public Awareness

Improving Community Appearance

A city with the natural amenities of Wilmington should not have such unattractive major road corridors and entrances.

Citizen remark during public input process

he FLUP public input process revealed that many people are concerned about the appearance of the city. Staff frequently heard from citizens that a city with the natural amenities of Wilmington should not have such unattractive major road corridors and entrances. Our roadways were characterized by citizens as unappealing due to the lack of landscaping and the generic corporate architecture and signs of chain stores and restaurants.

Many people commented on the negative impact that unattractive roads and entrances might have on tourism and economic development. Although there were no major changes to community appearance in 2005, a number of efforts were started that will lead to notable improvements over time.

Market Street Enhancements





The adopted 5-year Capital Improvements Program includes \$6.3 million beginning in FY 07 to place a median and landscaping enhancements in Market Street from Colonial Drive to New Centre Drive.

Appearance Enhancements

- The adopted 5-year Capital Improvements Program includes \$6.3 million beginning in FY 07 to place a median and landscaping enhancements in Market Street from Colonial Drive to New Centre Drive.
- Staff developed a Design Preferences manual on CD and distributed it to members of the development community. The manual describes encouraged design features intended to improve the aesthetics of development and provides examples of development practices that are discouraged.
- The City and NCDOT are cooperating to replace the chain-link fence in the Shipyard Boulevard median in front of Hoggard High School with a more attractive fence that is less likely to collect trash at its base.



Chain link fence

Attractive fence

- City Council approved several Conditional District rezonings with conditions that restricted signage to low monument signs instead of pole signs. In some of these cases, the conditions also called for wider landscaped streetyards than the code requires. Also, some of the rezonings were part of redevelopment projects along Oleander Drive and Carolina Beach Road where almost 20-foot wide street frontage green spaces replaced concrete.
- The adopted 5-year Capital Improvements Program includes \$3.05 million beginning in FY 06 to enhance the City entrance at North 3rd Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway. An additional \$2 million is proposed in the Transportation Bond.

- Staff has completed design of a lane closure and streetscape improvements for the City entrance at Dawson Street. Construction is expected to begin in Spring 06 and be completed by late 2006.
- The Capital Improvements Program also includes \$3.8 million for several streetscape improvement projects in downtown beginning in FY 06.
- The City took over landscaping maintenance of State roads resulting in more frequent and intensive clean-up and beautification efforts.
- Trees were planted in the College Road median near Shipyard Boulevard.
- Staff is working with property owners along North 4th Street where there are both decorative and standard street lights to remove the standard lights as development occurs.
- The City teamed with downtown residents, civic organizations and property owners to "adopt" and clean up three downtown alleys.

Staff is working with property owners along North 4th Street where there are both decorative and standard street lights to remove the standard lights as development occurs.



Reducing Traffic Congestion

Traffic congestion is frequently listed as a major concern of city residents.

raffic congestion is frequently listed as a major concern of city residents. The FLUP process revealed that the degree to which congestion is a concern depends on individual perspective. Citizens who grew up in the area or moved from more rural areas are most concerned while people who relocated from larger urban areas like Atlanta, Washington DC or Charlotte are not as bothered by congestion in this area. Whether it is the community's biggest problem or not, there is clearly room for improvement.

Traffic congestion levels in the area are generally the result of our geography and years of poor land use and transportation planning. Almost all major roads carry more traffic than they were designed to handle. The FLUP recognizes that there will be more cars on our roads in the future whether we plan for growth and redevelopment or whether we just let it happen based on current zoning.

The FLUP provides guidance to encourage more efficient development patterns. However, the benefits of the new development patterns will not be sufficient to overcome the deficiencies of the existing transportation system. In order to improve safety and traffic flow, improvements to all parts of the transportation system are necessary. There have been a number of recent efforts to make our roads safer and less congested.



Traffic Congestion along Market Street

Roadway Improvements

- The final leg of the Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway connecting downtown to I-40 and Market Street opened in fall 2005.
- A total of \$6.3 million is included in the Capital Improvements Program to install a median and other access management enhancements on Market Street from Colonial Drive to New Centre Drive. The developer of the Stokely Center was required to help fund a concrete median from New Centre Drive to Eastwood Road.
- The 5th Avenue Bridge is under construction with completion scheduled in summer 2006.



- A key part of the Gingerwood Collector street system was completed with the opening of the New Centre Drive extension to Kerr Avenue and the approval of Stokely Center that will ultimately complete the Ringo Drive connection to College Road.
- Staff is working with NCDOT to complete the sidewalks along South 16th and 17th Streets in the vicinity of the hospital.

- The Giles Road rezoning resulted in the closure of a driveway on Oleander Drive and rerouting of traffic to a side street.
- The design for the Independence Boulevard widening from Shipyard Boulevard to Carolina Beach Road is almost complete. The project is expected to be completed in 2007.
- The Randall Parkway widening design is almost complete and construction is scheduled to be completed in 2007.
- The Military Cutoff widening is under construction with completion scheduled in 2007.
- The College Road/Oleander Drive intersection study was completed and the "Quadrant Approach" is recommended for funding in the Transportation Improvement Program (ROW acquisition in FY 09 and construction in FY 11).
- Traffic-calming structures for eight neighborhoods are under design and \$1 million is proposed in the Transportation Bond to expedite construction.
- The Eastwood multi-use path is substantially complete.
- The Park Avenue bike path was completed.



...continued from

Reducing Traffic Congestion



All closed circuit TV cameras were upgraded and a new camera was added on College Road.



The SafeLight program was continued at all 15 intersections despite the possible loss of full funding from citations.

Signal timing analyses were conducted on seven roads resulting in more efficient timing sequences.

Operational Improvements

- All closed circuit TV cameras were upgraded and a new camera was added on College Road.
- The traffic signals along the newly opened section of Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway and the signals at Monkey Junction were coordinated with the existing system to improve efficiency.
- Traffic camera images are available on the NCDOT website to facilitate emergency response including possible evacuations.
- The SafeLight program was continued at 15 of our most dangerous intersections despite the possible loss of full funding from citation revenue.
- The Cape Fear Breeze effort launched an incentive program to encourage alternatives to single-occupant vehicles with services including parking benefits from employers and a web site to facilitate carpooling.
- A new left-turn signal is being evaluated for safety improvements at the College Road and K-Mart/ Dick's Sporting Goods intersection.
- Signal timing analyses were conducted on seven roads resulting in more efficient timing sequences.



Mass Transit

- Council selected a preferred site for the Multi-modal Transportation Center and \$836,000 was allocated in the Federal Transportation Bill (SAFETEA-LU) for land acquisition. A total of \$2 million in City funds is proposed in the Capital Improvements Program in FY 08.
- The WAVE free downtown trolley ridership has increased almost 100% since 2004 with approximately 45,000 riders in 2005. Expansion of this service is proposed in FY 06.

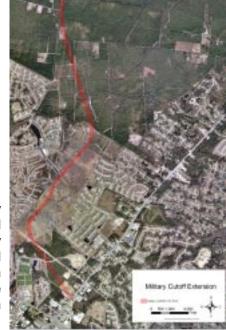


Downtown Trolley

- Fixed route bus ridership is up almost 40% over the previous year.
- UNCW shuttle ridership has increased almost 100% since 2004 with approximately 175,000 riders in 2005.
- The Columbus Connector was initiated to connect workers in Columbus County with jobs in downtown Wilmington.
- The Brunswick Connector began operation linking bus riders in Brunswick County to the WAVE transit system.

Planning

- Eight Neighborhood Traffic studies have been completed to help calm traffic and improve safety in residential areas.
- The Leland and NC 133/US 17 Collector Street Plans were completed. These plans benefit Wilmington by planning for growth along key access routes to and from the city.
- The City developed and filed a corridor protection map to preserve a portion of the route needed for the Cape Fear SkyWay.
- Several traffic enhancements are required as part of the Autumn Hall mixed use rezoning including connections to existing developments, full internal connectivity and improved access controls on Eastwood Road.
- The City developed and filed the Military Cutoff Road corridor protection map for the planned northern extension.



The City
developed and
filed the Military
Cutoff Road
corridor protection
map for the
planned northern
extension.

Strengthening the Economy

The City Council's top priority in the City's Strategic Plan is a vibrant economy.

▼ he City Council's top priority in the City Strategic Plan is a Vibrant Economy. Council goals include enhancing the tax base, reducing reliance on single family homes for the property tax base and creating higher paying jobs. Land use is intrinsically linked to economic development. Land use planning provides the sites, infrastructure and amenities for the businesses needed to achieve the Council's economic development objectives. The FLUP contains directives that are consistent with the Strategic Plan such as encouraging high-end commercial development and more efficient land use patterns. The following recent actions have helped strengthen the economy:



The Convention Center design and development agreement were approved by City Council.

Economic Development

- The PPD global headquarters in downtown was approved for construction.
- The Convention Center design and development agreement were approved by City Council.
- A number of office buildings have been approved in the hospital /Medical Center Drive area.
- The Castle Street Main Street Mixed Use (MSMU) rezoning will be a catalyst for redevelopment in that area.
- The Stokely Center/Costco commercial project was approved for construction.
- The Autumn Hall mixed use rezoning was approved permitting approximately 200 acres of mixed use development.
- Mayfaire continued to develop adding a community center, movie theater and additional residential development.



Mayfaire continued to develop adding a community center, movie theater and additional residential development.

• A proposal to rezone a portion of Worth Drive for residential use was rejected. The site was identified as part of the Industrial Center in the FLUP. The industrial area is considered a key area for development to help diversify the City's tax base and reduce reliance on single family residential properties.

Setback

The owner of key properties located in the Randall Parkway infill area has chosen to proceed with an industrial warehouse making it highly unlikely the area will become a Class A office park and support redevelopment of Market Street.



The PPD global headquarters in downtown was approved for construction.

Parks and Public Spaces

Quality parks and public spaces help define a community.

uality parks and public spaces help define a community. Great parks and public spaces include the Mall in Washington DC, Central Park in New York, Millennium Park in Chicago and, closer to home, Charleston's Battery Park and Savannah's public squares.

The FLUP process identified significant deficiencies in parks and public spaces in Wilmington. The City has not developed a park with active recreation facilities since the late 1960s and the City lags well behind state and national benchmarks for providing parks. The public input process indicated a strong community desire for more parks and public spaces. Efforts to achieve that vision include:





Halyburton Park Nature Trail

Halyburton Park opened in 2006

Parks and Public Spaces Initiatives

- Halyburton Park opened in 2005.
- The Keenan Fountain restoration was completed.



Keenan Fountain Restoration

- Godwin Stadium improvements were completed.
- Alderman Nature Preserve was protected.
- A Parks and Greenspace Bond effort is underway to provide funding to support acquisition and development of new parks and enhancements to existing facilities.
- RiverWalk North and South were completed.



RiverWalk North and South were completed

- Efforts continue to develop a park at the former Love Grove landfill.
- The Capital Improvements Program includes \$3.8 million dollars for several streetscape improvement projects in downtown beginning in FY 06.
- A 1-acre "Events Lawn" is included in the convention center design.
- The Downtown Farmers Market continues to be very successful and was expanded to a weeknight at Halyburton Park.
- Improvements to Greenfield Lake, Empie Park and Maides Park were completed including resurfaced basketball courts, repaved trails, new observation decks and building repairs.



The Downtown
Farmers Market
continues to be
very successful
and was
expanded to a
weeknight
at Halyburton
Park.

Improvements to
Greenfield Lake, Empie
Park and Maides Park
were completed
including resurfaced
basketball courts,
repaved trails,
new observation decks
and building repairs.



Preserving our Assets Neighborhoods, History, Environment

Ensuring that inevitable change benefits our neighborhoods, historic areas and the environment.

here were a number of community assets identified during the FLUP process. Citizens want these resources preserved and enhanced. The FLUP contains recommendations related to ensuring that inevitable change benefits our neighborhoods, historic areas and the environment. Recent actions related to this effort include:





The CAMA Plan was adopted by City Council in March 2006.

The new Police headquarters is under construction in the NorthSide community area.

Preservation Activities

- The new Police Headquarters is under construction in the NorthSide community area.
- The Marsden Branch drainage improvements were completed.
- The Bethel Road water quality wetland project will be under construction in May 2006.
- A Sidewalk Needs Assessment (SNA) is underway to refine the general priorities in the FLUP including providing sidewalks near schools and medical facilities.



A SNA is underway to refine the general priorities in the FLUP including providing sidwalks near schools and medical facilities.

- The Taylor Homes housing project was demolished and redevelopment is in the planning stages.
- Home values have increased substantially indicating the strength of our neighborhoods.
- Several Greenfield Lake water quality improvement efforts have been implemented.
- The City was awarded an EPA grant to enhance Burnt Mill Creek.
- The CAMA Plan Update was adopted by City Council in March 2006.

- Staff completed a vacant land inventory to rank undeveloped land by environmental quality.
- Staff completed watershed, wetlands and water quality trends reports to analyze the impacts of development.
- A Historic District expansion report for Chestnut and Castle Streets was completed.
- A total of 12 in-house drainage maintenance projects have been completed.
- Staff helped initiate the Environmental Stewardship Awards program to promote developments that exhibit extra efforts to protect the environment.
- Local Historic Landmark designation reports were approved for the St. Andrews Church and manse, the Firehouse on South 5th Avenue and Fire Station # 5 at Wrightsville Avenue and 17th Street.

Setback

Key historic buildings have been demolished and market pressures are expected to continue to outweigh preservation efforts.



Firehouse on South 5th Avenue

Planned Growth

It was clear from the extensive community input sessions that citizens were concerned about the ad-hoc approach to development in the City.



Staff has regular meetings with people in the development industry to discuss FLUP policies prior to development investments and other decisions being finalized.

t was clear from the extensive community input sessions that citizens were concerned about the L ad-hoc approach to development in the City over the past 50 years. Development essentially occurred unplanned as market forces and individual land owners made decisions without a vision for how all the pieces would ultimately fit together as an overall city. The results of this approach are clear in areas such as:

- Traffic Congestion—Our traffic congestion is uncharacteristically high for a fairly low-density community due to failure to develop a full transportation network of freeways, arterials, collectors and local streets; poor access management along major roadways and inefficient land use patterns.
- Parks—Although there are a number of parks within the 1945 Corporate Limits, the City has not built a park with active recreation facilities since the late 1960s.
- Sidewalks— Although the City has developed to support cars as a main mode of transportation, there is a poor network of sidewalks for pedestrians, particularly in the recently annexed areas.
- Drainage—There had been no coordinated effort to provide stormwater drainage facilities over the years, resulting in a number of inefficiencies and deficiencies that will take years to correct.

The FLUP provides directives to consider the impacts of each development on the City as a whole and not as a series of unrelated, individual choices. The following is a summary of efforts to ensure future growth in Wilmington is planned and not ad-hoc.

Achieving the Vision

- All 18 of the developer-initiated rezonings approved by Council were generally consistent with FLUP directives.
- Several blocks of Castle Street were proactively rezoned from mostly suburban commercial designations to the newly adopted Main Street Mixed Use designation to facilitate redevelopment of the area. Also, a consultant recently completed a report on preferred redevelopment of the WAVE transit facility when it is ultimately vacated and returned to the City.

Several blocks of Castle Street were proactively rezoned from mostly suburban commercial designations to the newly adopted Main Street Mixed Use designation to facilitate redevelopment of the area.

 Staff has regular meetings with people in the development industry to discuss FLUP policies prior to development investments and other decisions being finalized.

- A request to rezone land off Greenville Loop Road currently zoned for single family residential to allow duplexes was withdrawn after staff recommended denial based on FLUP directives.
- A Carolina Beach Road site inappropriately zoned for commercial use was rezoned to multi-family residential at the owner's request. The rezoning was consistent with the FLUP directives to avoid strip commercial developments.
- It is critical to have complementary development regulations for successful implementation of any long range plan. The City Council adopted the Land Development Code in December 2004 and an initial code "clean-up" in fall 2005. This update, the first comprehensive code update in 20 years, and ongoing maintenance of the City's development regulations makes them substantially more consistent with the FLUP.
- A key future entry point to the City, Carolina Beach Road at Independence Boulevard, (the entry from the future Cape Fear SkyWay bridge) was enhanced by protecting part of the future right-of-way from development and denial of a rezoning from residential to an unconditioned commercial designation.



Cape Fear SkyWay

Public Awareness

While developing and adopting the FLUP was a positive step for the City—

implementation is critical.

eveloping and adopting the FLUP was a substantial positive step for the City because of the community's lack of prior support for planning initiatives. However, implementation of the FLUP is critical to ensure that the Plan will make a difference in the future of the community. In order to keep the FLUP in the public consciousness, which is very difficult in these busy times, the City must be constantly active. Public presentations, documents, videos and press are needed to remind people that there is a plan for the City's future—that we are not aimlessly drifting and letting change occur without guidance.

In order for FLUP implementation to be successful, it must retain the public's support. Public education, awareness and involvement efforts are ongoing to maintain that trust.





Staff continues to make presentations to any organization that would like to hear about the FLUP. Many groups that had a major role during Plan development have stayed connected during implementation including the Chamber of Commerce, Council of Neighborhood Associations, Business Alliance for a Sound Economy and several civic organizations.

Communication Efforts

• FLUP "posters" --

Staff developed an easy-to-read poster that includes the key components of the FLUP including the Composite Future Land Use Map with supporting photographs. Almost 5,000 of the posters have been distributed to the community at no charge.



Staff developed an easy-to-read poster that includes the key components of the FLUP including the Composite Future Land Use Map with supporting photographs. Almost 5,000 posters have been distributed.

Design Preferences CD —

Staff developed a Design Preferences Manual to support the FLUP. The manual is approximately 100 pages and contains hundreds of pictures indicating encouraged and discouraged design features. The document is available on CD to reduce costs. Approximately 50 CDs have been distributed at no charge.

FLUP Video —

A video version of the plan will be aired on GTV beginning in Spring 2006. The video is intended to appeal to a broader audience by using striking visual images of the city's preferred future.

Presentations —

Staff continues to make presentations to any organization that would like to hear about the FLUP. Many groups that had a major role during Plan development have stayed connected during implementation including the Chamber of Commerce, Council of Neighborhood Associations, Business Alliance for a Sound Economy and several civic organizations.

• FLUP Progress Report —

The annual report encourages accountability for implementing the Plan and draws attention to accomplishments and deficiencies to keep the community on track for long term success.



Staff developed a Design Preferences Manual to support the FLUP. The manual is approximately 100 pages and contains hundreds of pictures indicating encouraged and discouraged design features. Approximately 50 CDs have been distributed.

On the horizon Implementation Efforts

Redevelopment Zoning—

Staff is analyzing the Tier I Redevelopment Areas and working to develop incentives, including possible code changes, to encourage preferred redevelopment patterns. This effort is intended to improve traffic flow and the appearance of these aging commercial areas.

Build-Out Models—

Staff is completing analyses of the seven major Infill areas to determine the impacts of development typical of the City versus the preferred development patterns described in the FLUP. Factors being considered include traffic, schools, water, sewer, stormwater, and property and sales taxes generated. The data will be used to guide development requests and support capital expenditures including possible use of self-financing bonds.

Parks and Greenspace Bond—

If approved by voters, staff will pursue purchase of land and development of parks.

Transportation Bond—

If approved, staff will initiate the traffic signal systems upgrade as well as expedite several street, sidewalk and neighborhood traffic-calming projects.

Proactive Rezonings—

As a result of the success of the Castle Street rezoning, staff is considering City-initiated rezonings in areas where existing zoning is inconsistent with the Future Land Use Plan. The process will be similar to that used for the Castle Street Main Street Mixed Use rezoning. Areas under consideration include, Oleander Drive, Kerr Avenue and Greenville Avenue.

Wrightsville Avenue Land Use Plan—

This Plan is more than 15 years old and conditions have changed since it was adopted. The City also annexed areas of Wrightsville Avenue that were not included in the original study. A number of developments have been proposed or are expected that would result in land use transitions and changes in development scale. An updated plan would be more effective than considering changes to the corridor on a piecemeal basis.



House along Wrightsville Avenue

The Choices we make today will determine



their future...

